

Keeping Proper Focus

A Study from Esther

Intro:

- A. Fire is generally considered to be a positive tool:
 - i. Cooking, heating, cleaning and purifying, light, etc.
 - ii. But fire also has a wildly dangerous side to it: (*current wildfires*)
- B. The same can be seen from a spiritual perspective in scripture:
 - i. God led Israel in the form of a pillar of fire *Ex. 13*, but Israel would ultimately reject that leadership and use fire to worship idols
 - ii. Isaiah's lips were purified by fire in *Isa. 6:6-7*, but Israel would use it to defile themselves
- C. The positive/negatives of fire are up for discussion because of the subject of our study:

Focus

- i. Our word for Focus comes from the Latin word for Fire:
 - ii. Might call to mind having referred to someone focused on the Lord as "being on fire" with zeal
- D. Like fire, focus is generally thought of as something positive, something that we seek after:
 - i. We read books, articles, on how to improve our focus
 - ii. Study others who seem to have mastered it
- F. But also like fire, if not put in the right direction Focus can be a destructive force to the soul
 - i. Like so many positive traits that can be twisted to destructive ends, Focus placed on the wrong things is a detriment

i. Haman's Story:

- a. **Haman was a** man who had attained great amounts of both wealth and power:
 - i. in ***Esther 3:1-2***, we find that he was over all the princes and servants in the Kingdom
 - ii. Further on in the book, in *Esther 5:11*, while recounting his greatness to friends and family we also see that he had been blessed with many children and great riches:

iii. In hatching his plot against the Jews, Haman puts up 10,000 talents of silver of his own money to cover any expenses that might come from the King's treasury

b. **Haman was also** a man of reputation and influence:

i. Back in *Esther 5*, while boasting to his family, we see that not only had he been promoted above every other prince in the kingdom, but the king had taken the time to magnify him on multiple occasions

ii. Throughout the book Haman is seen giving council to the king, and can it be rightly inferred that he was a close friend and advisor to King Ahasuerus

iii. Indeed the king always followed the advice given him by Haman, both in the plot against the Jews: 5:8, and in how to honor Mordecai, 6:6-10

i. Ahasuerus even went so far as to give him his signet ring:

c. **This takes on** special significance when you consider this was the greatest empire the world had seen:

i. An empire that was strong enough to overthrow Babylon: *Daniel 5:30*

ii. This was an empire that had great wealth

iii. It would not be until the days of Alexander the Great that the Persian empire would be conquered.

i. Truly there were few people save the king who had more physical power than Haman

d. **But Where Was Haman's Focus?**

i. Consider how easily Haman is unhinged from being able to enjoy his blessings by Mordecai's refusal to bow to him: ***Esther 3:1-5***

ii. Reading on in verse 7, you see that Haman spent an entire year casting lots to wait for supposedly the perfect day to bring his plot to the king!

iii. Haman's focus was misplaced to such an extent that he allowed Mordecai to have an overwhelming and instant effect, one which ultimately determined his happiness: *Esther 5:9-13*

iv. In at least one instance Haman went in the opposite direction and was so focused on the positive that he failed to see his life was in danger: 5:7 banquer

- v. It was Haman's uncontrolled focus that ultimately would lead to his undoing: Not content to simply kill Mordecai, he wished the death of all Jews, 3:6, which would put him in very hot water with the Queen!

2. Learning from Haman: Don't Obsess over the Perceived Negatives

- a. We can be guilty of this in our homes and in our families:

- i. **In the** husband/wife relationship:

- 1. Often times spouses have unrealistic expectations of their counterparts: And when those expectations are not met they become blind to all of the positives of the marriage God has blessed them with and become focused on trying to "fix" their spouse.
 - 2. When our focus is misplaced to that degree, passages like Ephesians 5:22-30 are the last things on our mind: Wives aren't thinking about being subject to their husbands, and husbands aren't thinking about loving them as Christ does the Church: *Illus. of Colly's: The Wife who Got over her husband:*

- ii. **Children and** Parents:

- 1. The positive relationship of a parent and child can be ruined by misplaced focus: Children can allow themselves to focus on perceived lack of freedom, understanding, to the extent that they miss out completely on taking advantage of the wisdom and experience of their parents.
 - 2. Most of us have good relationships with our parents, and have come out of the age of knowing it all, and have taken advice on many subjects:
 - a. But what we might sound humorous as we remember our situations, is still a very serious issue for many Christians.
 - b. The division of this family relationship by focusing on the negative is something that for many has lasted beyond the teen years

- b. **We can** also be guilty of this in our Spiritual Walks:

- i. Especially in the area of repeated sins: portions of our faith that we continue to struggle with:
 - 1. The devil wants to take our focus off of the hope that is offered to us by the Lord through promised strength and forgiveness

2. Instead of finding encouragement in how many times God has picked us back up, we will find ourselves focused on how many times we've fallen down: and that is an attitude that has led many to be overcome with their failures to the point that they quit trying altogether
- ii. Satan wants us to become so focused on the deficiencies that we've overcome and lose sight of the countless ways that God's Word has changed our lives:
- c. **We can** also be guilty on a congregational level:
 - i. **There will** come a time when people we love and are encouraged by will have to move on to other places: and when that happens it can be far too easy to focus on those who are leaving and cease to be encouraged by those who are staying, those who are coming:
 - ii. **There may** come a time when those who we depend on leave under the terrible circumstance of falling away: This especially is a dangerous time to lose focus:
 1. The Apostles didn't quit over the thousands who didn't respond to the Gospel in Acts 2
 2. The eleven didn't sit around forever crippled by the betrayal of Judas:
 - a. Yet many Christians lose their focus and are rendered ineffectual in the Kingdom
 - iii. **In our** evangelistic efforts as a group, we can obsess over all those who reject our efforts to teach them the Gospel, that we forget to encourage those new to their faith, and don't uphold members who are weak in theirs
 - iv. **A congregation** can focus on a perceived lack of growth:
 1. Members of the church are prone to focus in on members who don't seem to be growing at the ideal pace, and in the process ignore those who are making progress
 - a. Again, I find it hard to imagine Paul so focused on the immaturity of John-Mark that he would miss out on the opportunity to cultivate his son in the Faith-- Timothy
 - v. **A congregation** can be so focused on the occasional struggle in cooperation and completely miss out on being encouraged by the achievements toward unity that

have been made: Candles have been snuffed out, bruised reeds broken, over issues as petty as what time to worship or the color of the classrooms.

1. But beyond that, to a more serious application, congregations can often forget all of the hard fought battles to come to unity because of one difficult to study issue:
 - a. Again, I find it hard to imagine that the Church in Jerusalem would have called it quits because of the issues around Circumcision in **Acts 15**. Throw away all of the growth since Pentecost!
 - b. Yet many congregations that have put in years of work to grow together, are divided by everyone's focus being placed on the negativity of a current situation.
 - c. Frank Jamerson: *You don't built anything by majoring on the weaknesses...we must major on the good points and minor on the weak points. We should try to build up the weak points, but they should not consume us!*

3. Not Obsessing on the Positive:

- a. In Our families:
 - i. Husbands and Wives all desire to have a good friendship: Our world is filled with many whole and enjoyable activities to do together: Running, Biking, Ping-Pong,
 1. But many couples take pride in how close they are, the interests they share, but their relationships are built on these sorts of activities instead of a deep and common love for God's Word:
 2. We can easily be so focused on physical fun, that we trick ourselves into thinking we've found fulfillment without ever seeing a need to spend time together in study and prayer, and worship: just the two of us alone!
 - ii. The relationship of parent and child can be taken out of focus here as well: Parents can lose sight completely of the importance of their child's future with God by obsessing over worldly success:
 1. Some parents are concerned only with scholarships, their children fitting in, what school they'll attend, what car to get them: (*Illus. of Aunt Judy*)
 2. As parents it can be easy to be focused on anything but teaching our children God's word as commanded in **Deut. 6:4-8**

- a. Focused on getting to school on time more than to church
 - b. Focused on making social functions more than Bible studies
 - c. Focused on their facebook status than their status with God
- b. **We can focus** on the positives of our spiritual walk to our hurt as well:
- i. Paul warns in 1 Cor. 10:14 that the devil would love for us to focus so much on our spiritual successes that we set ourselves up for a fall:
- c. **Congregations can fall** into the same trap:
- i. The Church at Corinth makes an excellent example: in 1 Cor. 12 they had become obsessed with their spiritual Gifts:
 - 1. These were indeed a positive, a great blessing to confirm God's word:
 - 2. But what did they open the door to by becoming obsessed with them:
 - a. ch 5: Sexual Immorality
 - b. Chs 8-9: destroying the consciences of weak brethren
 - c. ch 12: Pride, arrogance, and boasting
 - d. Ch 6: Defrauding their brethren
 - ii. There is a lot for churches today to focus on other than what is needed:
 - 1. Our nice buildings
 - 2. The quality of our bible class teachers
 - 3. Who we get for our gospel meetings
 - 4. The eloquence of our preachers:
 - a. The church can allow the devil to wreak havoc in by boasting in everything under the sun except for Christ

4. **Taking It with Us:**

- a. Keep in mind that whether we are focusing on the negative or the positive, if it is not where we should be, it has the power to destroy
- b. Keep in mind that in most cases, the negatives or positives we are obsessed with are never as extreme as we make them out to be
- c. In any case where our our focus is misplaced, it is often because we are focusing on ourselves
- d. The solution to all out of focus issues, is to realign our focus on Christ